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Article · January 2008

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## The Scope and Nature of the Gang Problem in Antigua & Barbuda

Submitted to  
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### Background

Street gangs have been identified as a global phenomenon. For example, gangs and gang members have been documented in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and South America. While the body of research on gangs in the Caribbean is negligible, street gang problems have been identified as a substantial threat to safety and security in at least two Caribbean countries—Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Regardless of the geographic region studied, gangs have been found to have a significant impact on general levels of violence and drug trafficking. Specifically, both policymakers and researchers have consistently found that: 1) gangs are responsible for much of the recurring violent conflict that occurs within communities; 2) gang membership is significantly related to increased levels of violence, property crime, and drug use and sales; and 3) gang homicides are often the driving force behind increases in general levels of homicide in a community.

For these reasons many communities have undertaken gang assessments. Such assessments are required to be **systematic** so that they can be reproducible; **in-depth** so that interventions can be designed to target specific populations or problems; and **broad** so that they capture the varied nature of the problem from multiple perspectives. Accordingly, gang assessments are used to understand whether a community has a gang problem, and if it does, to more thoroughly understand the magnitude of the gang problem. It is only after a thorough assessment of a community's gang problem that an effective gang control strategy can be developed.

This monograph serves as a report on the scope and nature of the gang problem in Antigua and Barbuda by providing information on the number of gangs, gang members, and gang homicides in the country. It also describes the composition of gangs, their organizational structure, and their involvement in criminal activity. In the sections below we provide information on the methods used for data collection, the analytical strategy used in the present study, major findings, and policy recommendations.

## Data and Analysis

The present study relied on two sources of data: a gang expert survey and homicide reports from 2006 and 2007. All data were collected during a one week period by OAS representatives in April 2008. Below we describe each of the data sources.

*Gang Expert Survey.* A survey instrument originally developed by the Eurogang Consortium, and modified for use in Trinidad and Tobago, was employed for data collection. The “gang expert survey” was developed for the purpose of collecting data about gangs and gang members from a broad array of stakeholder groups. The instrument is designed to collect information about the number of gangs and gang members in a specific geographic area, and collects information about each gang’s organizational structure and composition, their involvement in crime, and the year each gang was formed.

The survey instrument was administered to three stakeholder groups: law enforcement officers, school professionals, and non-governmental organization (NGO) personnel. Individuals from each group were invited by the Ministry of Justice and Public Safety. At the beginning of each session stakeholders were informed about the purpose of the project and were provided with a survey instrument to be completed within a one-hour period. Respondents were asked to only include information about which they felt knowledgeable about. After the survey instruments were completed by respondents the data was entered into a statistical software package (i.e., SPSS) and was analyzed for the purpose of this report. A total of 124 instruments were turned in to the research team, of which 81 were either not completed, reported no knowledge of any gangs, or did not contain enough information to assist in the research process. Among the 43 completed and usable instruments, 18 were from law enforcement officers, 9 from school officials, and 16 from NGO personnel.<sup>1</sup>

*Homicide Reports.* Official homicide data were collected from the Royal Antigua Police Force homicide unit. This included data from the homicide unit’s diary of records which contained information on number of homicides, arrests for homicides, and information pertaining to case, and offender victim characteristics. Much of this information was contained in written logs where we were required to extract the data manually. In the end, detailed homicide data were collected by OAS representatives for both 2006 and 2007.

## Number of Youth Gangs and Gang Members

Data analysis revealed that law enforcement officials were aware of 15 gangs and estimated that there were between 264 to 570 gang members in Antigua and Barbuda. Most of the officers were unaware of the year that these gangs were formed, and learned about the gangs through their experiences on the job. School officials, on the other hand, identified six (6) gangs and estimated the presence of 85 to 160 members. None of the educators were aware of the year the gangs were formed and many (40%) knew

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<sup>1</sup> Of the 81 surveys that were not used for the present study 38 were from law enforcement officials, 54 from school officials, and 32 from NGO personnel.

about gangs through their work with students at school. NGO's identified 14 gangs and estimated that there were 148 to 310 gang members in Antigua and Barbuda. Once again, NGO's for the most part were unaware of the year that these gangs were formed and the majority of these respondents learned about gang through the media and their friends. Very few NGO's had knowledge about gangs that was derived from their work.

### **Composition of Gangs**

Regardless of the stakeholder group, most gang members were reported to be African/Antiguan, with some reports of Guayaman (Puerto Rico) and Jamaicans being involved in gangs. Likewise, respondents from all three stakeholder groups agreed that gangs were primarily composed of males. For example, 86% of law enforcement officers, 100% of school officials, and 70% of NGO's indicated that the gangs they were familiar with were "all male" or "mostly male." There was only two all female gang identified by the stakeholder groups. Stakeholder groups had varying experiences with regard to the typical age of gang members. Specifically, about 92% of law enforcement officers reported that most gang members were between the ages of 16 and 25 years old. On the other hand, 75% of school officials reported that most gang members were between the ages of 12 and 15, and all of the NGO's agreed that most gang members were between the ages of 12 and 25. While most (92.9%) police officers indicated that gangs varied in size from 11 to 50 members, school officials primarily saw gangs comprising 11 to 20 individuals, and NGO reported that gangs ranged in size from 6 to 100 members.

### **Organizational Characteristics of Gang**

All of the gangs reported by stakeholders had a name, which is a key characteristic of street gangs. While most of the troublesome youth groups identified by stakeholders were referred to as a gang, there was some variation noted. For example, 60% of law enforcement officers reported that the troublesome youth groups were called a gang, but 20% referred to them as a crew 10% referred to them as a posse, and 10% did not have a term that was used. All of the school personnel and NGO's noted that the groups they were referring to were either called a gang or a crew. Over 90% of the stakeholders reported that gangs spend a lot of time together in public places like the park, the street, shopping areas, or the neighborhood. Over 90% of police officers reported that gangs in Antigua claim turf, where as 85% of NGO's and 60% of school officials made the same claim, and most of these stakeholders reported that gangs defend their turf against other groups. All of the stakeholders reported that gangs have symbols (clothing, ways of speaking, or other physical identifiers) that distinguish them from other groups. Last, while school officials and NGO's reported that gangs do not promote a particular political issue, 30% of law enforcement officers reported that gangs do promote a particular political issue. Finally, we provided stakeholders with five organizational descriptions of gangs. These organizational descriptions characterize the five most common types of gangs in existence today. The results within and between stakeholder groups were inconsistent and lacked pattern. This finding suggests that stakeholders may not have a strong understanding of the organizational composition and structure of gangs in Antigua and Barbuda.

## Criminal Involvement of Gangs

Regardless of the stakeholder group, respondents agreed that gangs were accepting of criminal activity and were involved in alcohol use, drugs, property crime, and violence. For example, all respondents reported that illegal activity was accepted by the group and the majority of stakeholders reported that the gangs that they knew about were involved in at least a few types of crime, if not a lot of different types of crime. Likewise, law enforcement officials, school officials, and NGOs reported that gang members sometimes or often use alcohol and drugs. One of the few differences between the stakeholder groups pertained to their perception of gang involvement in fights with rival groups. For example, over two-thirds of law enforcement officials reported that gangs are often involved in fights with rival groups, whereas most school officials and NGOs reported that such fights occur only sometimes or rarely occur. Respondents also reported on the crimes commonly engaged in by gangs. All three of the stakeholder groups reported that “larceny” and drug trafficking/sales were the most common crimes committed by gangs. Whereas the police reported that gangs also engage in robbery and battery/wounding, school officials reported that gangs engage in violence, shootings, and fights, and NGO’s reported that gangs engage in drug use and “other forms of deviance.”

To further examine the magnitude of the gang problem we examined gang involvement in homicides. In 2006 and 2007 there were a total of 29 homicides. The majority (41.3%) of homicides in Antigua involved domestic altercations (n=6) or were related to drugs (n=6). Of the 29 homicides, only 3.4% (n=1) were gang related.

## Summary and Policy Recommendations

After data collection and analysis it is evident that Antigua has a gang problem, but that the problem is minor. The gang problem appears to have emerged fairly recently (i.e., since 2000), with gangs primarily being comprised of young Antiguan males. The gangs do not appear to be highly organized, but rather are comprised of small groups of fairly unorganized youth who share common customs, culture, symbols, and turf. While gangs are criminally involved, they engage in relatively low levels of violence and are responsible for very few homicides. Therefore, all of the data suggests that Antigua has an “emerging” gang problem.

With the above in mind we have two major policy recommendations. The first is that the Royal Antiguan Police Force create a gang squad. The gang squad would be comprised of one (1) or two (2) officers, who would be organizationally placed in an intelligence unit, and would be responsible for collecting intelligence on gangs, gang members, and gang crime. These individuals should belong to the California Gang Investigators Association (<http://www.cgiaonline.org/>), and should receive initial gang training in Great Britain, Canada, or the United States. Second, the Antigua Royal Police Force should provide all officers and investigators with a minimum of a two day training course (16 hours) on gangs and effective responses to gangs. The cost of such training could be minimized by bringing in one law enforcement officer and one academic for the training sessions, and conducting the training over a one or two week period.